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C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 000117

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/11/2018
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [VE](#)
SUBJECT: CHAVEZ MAINTAINS MANEUVERING ROOM REGARDING OBAMA
AND NEW ADMINISTRATION

REF: CARACAS 0077

Classified By: Political Counselor Francisco Fernandez
for Reason 1.4 (d).

¶1. (SBU) Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez has softened his comments towards President Obama in recent days. Backing away from his previous attacks, Chavez declared on January 24 that he was "pleased" with Obama's decree to close the Guantanamo detention center and that the new American president deserved "a waiting period." The Venezuelan strongman credited a letter from Fidel Castro praising Obama as "a man with good intentions." Picking up on a line from the inaugural address, Chavez added "our hands are open and we're full of hope."

¶2. (SBU) Foreign Minister Nicolas Maduro, who on January 20 called Obama's comments about Venezuela on Univision "false, offensive and ignorant," was qualifying U.S. - Venezuelan relations on January 27 as "progressing correctly and in the best way possible." Maduro added that there was optimism that "windows would open" during April's Summit of the Americas in Trinidad. The Foreign Minister tempered journalists optimism by noting "it would take some time," before ambassadors could be exchanged.

¶3. (C) Comment: Ever the tactician, Chavez has quickly backed off attacking the popular new president to support his short term domestic political agenda. However, like previous promises of improved relations, this softening does not necessarily presage a strategic reassessment of our bilateral relations. End Comment.

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